

^{talk}
paper delivered at a Public Meeting¹

Everybody that comes into CLYDESIDE ACTION ON ASBESTOS to fill up a claim form for the DSS is a victim of asbestos; they're all suffering asbestos-related diseases of some kind or another but 88 percent still get refused, they are denied their benefits. There is no question they suffer asbestos diseases. We know it and they know it, and so do the DSS medical authorities, but still they don't diagnose. The medical profession won't even tell people what diseases they've got.

It may sound incredible but this is what we're talking about: people are catching incurable diseases and not getting proper treatment and care; and when these diseases are industrial these asbestos victims are not getting their proper benefits. They are forced to spend their time fighting to get their welfare rights instead of being allowed to cope with the mental torture of having an illness which is incurable and which they know they'll die from sooner or later.

And even here, when people die of asbestos cancers like mesothelioma and the doctor admits that's what they died of, even then the DSS still has it in its power to stop the widow getting the posthumous benefits. The DSS medical authorities say the victim died of another cancer altogether. In fact what the DSS does here is exactly the same as what the asbestos-industry has been doing for 60 years, using everything in their power to stop the victims getting justice, using every dirty trick in the book - the trouble is the dirty tricks are legal.

These DSS benefits and allowances are rights and we've got to remember that, they're not favours and they're not privileges, they're rights. The government is duty-bound to give these rights to any victim of industrial disease. And the fight for asbestos victims is a fight on rights all the way down the line, basic human rights.

Let's be clear about it: in 99 cases out of a 100 the employers knew about the dangers; all the big name yards along the Clyde, all the legends, Stephens, Fairfields, Harland and Wolff, right the way down to Greenock and the other side Yarrow, Browns, Connells, the Blythwood - they all knew about it. That's why the insurers will admit liability when a victim goes for compensation against them. Because they've got no case. They knew they were putting men and women to work in conditions that could kill and did kill and is still killing. And so did the government: for nearly a hundred

¹ held in Govan, allowing prospective candidates for a local by-election air their views on the subject

years the state authorities have known the dangers of asbestos but they've allowed the asbestos industry and other employers to get away with it by not enforcing their own health and safety regulations.

National governments and local governments can lay down these health and safety regulations from here to eternity but if they don't enforce them and they don't monitor them properly then they'd be as well doing nothing at all because they're not worth the paper they're written on.

The employers knew they could get away with poisoning these workers. And they did get away with it. And in far too many cases they're still getting away with it. And the government is still not doing anything about it. And it's not just national government we're talking about but local government. And this is why this evening we've invited the candidates for this regional by-election to outline their positions with regard to the horrific plight of asbestos victims.

This is not just a party issue. Asbestos victims will talk to anybody. They can't afford to be choosy. But it's action and not lip-service that's needed; it's some degree of genuine commitment that we hope will come out of this public meeting.

Govan and the Clyde is the home of shipbuilding in this country. That makes Glasgow and the West of Scotland one of the worst places in the world for asbestos diseases.

In Glasgow a few weeks ago asbestos was removed from a school out in Drumchapel and two guys working in a community centre spotted them chucking the asbestos in plastic bags from the first landing down to the playground and the bags were bursting, and there was a wee boy of about twelve playing about. The two guys also videoed it on a cam recorder. They called up us and we went out and found asbestos littering the school playground.

This was two months ago.

These people we're talking about don't care if they contaminate the playground and they don't care if they kill children. They don't care. Because there's no comeback. In this country there is no way of putting these people on trial for their crimes. The only thing that happens is they get set a paltry fine.

And then they go and do the same thing again. They don't care. Why should they? This particular firm has already been fined but they're still doing it and they're still getting away with it and as far as we know they're still being employed by

Strathclyde Regional Council. It's incredible. We're saying that asbestos is at dangerous levels in public buildings and in some ordinary homes. And even when it is being stripped out of buildings the work is not being monitored properly, no one seems to be keeping track of it properly. And even where they do the authorities' ideas on safety levels are just not enough to safeguard the ordinary public.

In comparison with other parts of Europe what's going on here in Strathclyde Region is simply not good enough, people are being contaminated and they'll continue being contaminated until real practical steps are taken. And maybe the first step of all is that the authorities admit the truth of what's going on, that the authorities admit to the cover-up that's been going on for close to a hundred years.

There's a great many myths about the dangers. One has to do with age, it's only people up in years that suffer and die. But from Australia we have a report of children dying of mesothelioma.

And when ordinary members of the public catch asbestos disease they won't even be entitled to claim disability benefit. Because the DSS only pay out benefits and allowances to people who get the disease through their work. These environmental victims won't receive a penny. They'll be left to sicken and eventually die of these progressive illnesses. And in the majority of cases no doctor will even have diagnosed what it is they're suffering from. So, like victims of industrial asbestos-poisoning they will never ever receive proper care and attention; how can they if their disease isn't diagnosed?

Many people here tonight will have seen copies of the Asbestos Charter and it's important that you read the stuff that's there as well as signing it, and this will give an idea of the cover-up that we say also involves elements within the medical profession. Any victim of asbestos will tell you that the first and most difficult battle to win, is just to get a doctor to write down on a bit of paper what it is that you're actually suffering from. The prospective councillors here may think some of this sounds far-fetched. Let them speak to any victim of asbestos. Let them come into Clydeside Action and see the hundred of files we have on victims. Let them talk to widows and relatives of men who died of a disease that the medical profession said they didn't have.

Who knows how many tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of people in this country who have died of asbestos disease. Nobody knows because the authorities have been suppressing the information and dishing out various

propaganda. All this stuff about asthma and emphysema and the rest of it. Why do they never speak about asbestosis. Why do they never mention it. The disease that exists in name but not in reality.

80 percent of all asbestos cancers are lung cancers. Okay, we know Glasgow is cancer capital of the world. But how many times have you ever seen asbestos put down as ^athe cause? When do you see asbestos put down as a cause of lung cancer. Never. Why wont they give out the information. Why do they deny the facts and deny the reality.

It's up to every politician to fight to safeguard the health of the people, just like it's up to every trade union official to fight to safeguard the health of their members. And for far too long they've looked the other way. For far too long they've played the game that the powers-that-be have asked them to play. Well it's time to stop. Maybe it's happening already and we dont know about it because of the propaganda or because the doctors are denying diagnosis.

The burden of proof is always on the victim. You're guilty until you've proved yourself innocent. And that means you're forced to run the gauntlet, they line you up against a battery of doctors who always start out by denying you have it. They put you down as anything from bronchitis to emphysema, to asthma, or budgie and canary disease, or lung cancer caught by smoking; c o a d - anything at all except the truth, that you've got an asbestos disease. Because of the physical and mental stress caused to victims many of them die in the process of trying to give the authorities the proof they're looking for. And that's before we even start talking about biopsies.

The problem is that asbestos victims get so caught up in their own terrible plight that they scarcely have time to think about the overall picture of what's happening. Their plight is so terrible they scarcely have the chance to remember what the real issue is. And unfortunately, for far too long the leaders of the Labour Movement have forgotten what the fight is.

Pat McCrystal summed it up in his fight with the legal profession. Pat McCrystal told his lawyers and he told his union and he told anybody else that would listen, he told them and he kept on telling them, I'm not interested in your money, I'm not interested in your financial compensation. What is it you want? they asked him. Name your price? But there is no price. How can you put a price on somebody's life. Pat McCrystal talked about justice. He reduced them to silence.